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## Book Notes

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## BOOK NOTES

These pages contain notes of books of recent publication that contain information of interest to our members.

The first is Benjamin King's *A Bullet For Lincoln* (Pelican Pub. Co., 1101 Monroe, Gretna, LA 70053, \$19.95), a work of fiction that advances a conspiracy theory in the assassination of the president. The actual assassin is a character named Anderson, first introduced in King's *A Bullet For Stonewall*, whose apparent demise in this book makes impossible a resurrection for a third "bullet." John Wilkes Booth, who until now mostly received blame for the fatal shot, is here predicted as a would-be kidnapper of the president who is used by Anderson to eliminate the one person in the government who would have assisted the South in its recovery after the war. Reason: J.P. Morgan hired Anderson to do the deed so Federal largess would be spent in the west on railroads – so he could make more money. Plot is a bit far-fetched, and the style lacks Micheneresque proportions, but I love a mystery and don't care much for Morgan, so I thought it interesting.

Early in the 1960s, while a doctoral student at LSU, I attended my first Walter Lynwood Fleming Lecture on Southern History. Either Norman Graebner or Clement Eaton – I can't recall which, but heard both while in residence – held forth. I had never heard of the Fleming Lectures before; since I have come to regard them as the premier series in the field. Appropriately, Pulitzer Prize-winner James M. McPherson delivered the 55th Fleming Lectures, here printed as *What They Fought For, 1861-1865* (Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, LA 70803). McPherson explains that this is part of a larger study to be titled "Why They Fought" when published; these three lectures concentrate on Northern and Southern motivation in an ideological sense, and slavery. McPherson's sources are the letters of participants, and he quotes from them extensively to illustrate such points as Northerners fighting for Union more than slavery, Southerners fighting to escape slavery and to repel invasion, and their differences over slavery as a cause of the war. Brief, good.

More Civil War: Harry W. Pfanz, *Gettysburg: Culp's Hill & Cemetery Hill* (University of North Carolina Press, Box 2288, Chapel Hill, NC 27515) would have to be called a specialized study; it deals with the players and drama of specific areas of our nation's most significant in-land battle. Pfanz writes well, so this microscopic look does not descend into the tedium that could have been fatal. He provides biographical data when introducing the commanders, and the volume contains a great many photos and maps. For hard-core fans of the battle, there is also a lengthy Order of Battle for the Army of the Potomac and the Army of Northern Virginia.

Pelican Publishing Company (1101 Monroe, Gretna, LA 70053) has produced two more products for "professional Southerners:" *The South Was Right*, by James Ronald and Walter Donald Kennedy, and *The Southerner's Instruction Book*, by Jim and Susan Erskine. Authors of the first believe that "the South had legitimate reasons to assert its claim to independence" and propose to show how "our Southern nation was invaded and conquered by a

cruel and ruthless enemy who despised our people" (pp. 8-9). With more humor, the Erskine's offer 350 one-liners to characterize Southerners. I liked the following best: "Never bend over without hiking up your pants first;" "If Mamma ain't happy, ain't nobody happy;" "The wise man remembers his wife's birthday and forgets her age;" "You know how you really feel about your neighbor when a 'For Sale' sign goes up in front of his house;" and best of all, "The first bug to hit your windshield is bound to land right in front of your eyes." I got more out of the latter book than the former one, maybe because it reminds me of Bob Bowman's books on East Texas.

*Liz Carpenter, Girl From Salado*, by Betty Wilke Cox (Eakin Press, Box 90159, Austin, TX 78709) resulted from the author's association with the biographee as friend, housesitter, and observer of Texas affairs as librarian for the Austin *American-Statesman*. It is largely an anecdotal presentation of the eventful life of this "girl from Salado" who is the daughter of Texas pioneers, proud graduate of the University of Texas, Washington Journalist, aide and friend to both LBJ and Mrs. LBJ, and now in a fifth or sixth career, inspiration to all who are growing older because she is still "getting better all the time." Perhaps the most useful portions deal with Carpenter's family history and with her activities immediately following the assassination of JFK. Reading level would be appropriate for secondary students.

Janice Woods Windle's *True Women* (G.P. Putnam's Sons, 200 Madison Ave., New York 10016 – \$28.50) is a wonderful novel based on the lives of her great-grandmothers and maternal grandmother. What lives they lived! Their time in Texas paralleled all the historic events and involved many of the persons of historical importance during the Anglo years of the nineteenth century and the first third of the twentieth century, and they seemed always to live in the middle of the arena where great events in the drama of Texas played out. The "voice" of the novel is definitely feminine, and although most of their husbands seem to have been saints, inevitably all of their troubles came from men – especially the wars that bounced them about and took away husbands and sons. This is the best-written novel these old eyes have examined in some time. Highly recommended.

Michael C.C. Adams' *The Best War Ever: America and World War II* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2715 N. Charles St., Baltimore, MD 21218), a part of the American Moment Series, is a book much different from what the title might suggest; the title is at least irony. What Adams does here is dispute the "best war" myth associated with WWII. Postwar traumatic syndrome did not begin just with the "bad war" in Vietnam. WWII had its share – as much as 30% of casualties; divorces increased, juvenile delinquency resulted from parental absence, etc., etc. Adams does confirm that the U.S. had little choice in whether or not to fight once the war began or that we were on the winning side. Probably he is right about the myth – especially among descendants of the generations that bore the battle-front and home-front burdens, and he provides a counterpoint to the nostalgia. But darn it, it still is the "best war ever."

Betty Hanna's *Ladies of the House: How to Survive as the Wife of a Texas Legislator* (Eakin Press, P.O. Drawer 90159, Austin, TX 78709, \$14.95) is a

fun book written by the wife of long-time legislator Joe Hanna, and herself a past president of the club and member of the Texas Historical Commission. Hanna undertook the assignment to write a history of this "exclusive" club of ladies whose husbands currently or previously served in the Texas House of Representatives for the ladies themselves, but all us "political junkies" will enjoy it as well – especially about LBJ worrying about the toilet seat standing at attention during a visit of the club to his ranch. My favorite anecdote: one wife painted such a happy picture of life in Austin to a constituent that the constituent's husband filed against her legislator-husband in the next election. Thereafter she only talked to folks backhome about going to church and charity work. Good pictures and "insider" stories.

George C Herring, *LBJ And Vietnam* (University of Texas Press: Austin, 1994, Box 7819, Austin, TX 78713-7819 – \$29.95), is the latest volume in "An Administrative History of the Johnson Presidency Series" produced in conjunction with the LBJ Library. Herring previously wrote *America's Longest War and The Secret Diplomacy of the Vietnam War*, and writes with authority on the failure of President Lyndon B. Johnson's conduct of the war. Herring says that Johnson made war "in cold blood," quoting Secretary of State Dean Rusk, meaning that he maneuvered the U.S. into the conflict without generating the kind of national support that brought the Home Front into full support of the Battle Front; in other words, without emotion. Then, says Herring, LBJ also bungled handling of peace feelers from whatever source, management of civilian and military affairs and personalities, and tried always to stand on middle ground until that ground eroded from beneath him, all to protect the Great Society programs that constituted the priority of his administration. One thing is certain: there will be more second-guessing and analysis of this war in the years to come.

*Ma's in the Kitchen, You'll Know When It's Done! The Recipes and History of Governor Miriam A. Ferguson, First Woman Governor of Texas* (including a foreword by the second woman governor, the Hon. Ann W. Richards), by Carl Randall McQueary and May Nelson Paulissen (Eakin Press, P.O. Drawer 90159, Austin 78709-0159, \$16.95) is a tribute to food – every personal or political event in the lives of the Fergusons is punctuated with what was served on the occasion. To this is added nearly 100 pages of recipes, and the most interesting part of all: homilies by Ma. The biographical material is laudatory and the problem areas and scandals glossed or ignored, but the food, always the food, is emphasized. I shall try some of the recipes.

*Twelve Days in Texas*, by Donna D. Cooner and illustrated by Bob Leland (Hendrick-long Pub. Co., Dallas, 75225), with a picture-text format, is for young Texans. Playing on the theme of the twelve days of Christmas, in this case "On the first day of spring My true love brought to me" not leaping lords or hens but mockingbirds, javelinas, armadillos, lazy longhorns, lone star flags, cotton, jumping jackrabbits, Indian paintbrushes, mourning doves, long-tailed opossums, and bluebonnets, and on the twelfth day of spring, "I moved." There follows, in mature style, explanations for each in case the book falls into the hands of outsiders.